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**INSTANT MESSAGING**

# Manage Public IM Traffic in IBM Lotus Sametime Gateway

Discover the implications for IT managers of the added instant messaging traffic now that the Sametime Gateway can communicate with other IM systems.

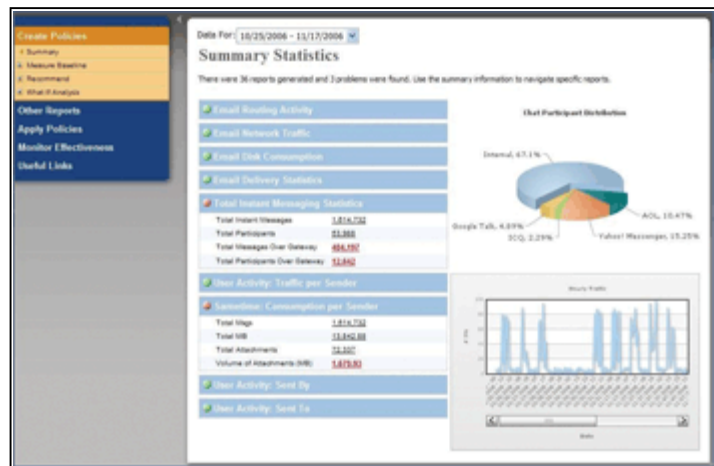
[Back to standard article layout](#)

By Stephen Grinder, DYS Analytics Inc. senior director of product management

IBM's introduction of Lotus Sametime Gateway has been lauded by industry experts for letting users communicate with external messaging communities such as AOL, AIM, ICQ, Google Talk, Apple iChat, Yahoo! Messenger, and soon, MSN. Many consider the platform, available free to Sametime licensees, to be a major step toward standardization of the IM platform in the enterprise -- and an avenue for reaching younger entrants in the workforce accustomed to real-time dialogs.

The Sametime Gateway also typifies IBM's UC2 (unified communications and collaboration) emphasis on contextual collaboration. The concept is that by integrating rich presence information, instant messaging, e-mail, Web, voice, video, and business applications across multi-vendor environments, companies will realize greater organizational productivity. For administrators and IT staffs,

Sametime Gateway eliminates the need for organizations to



**Figure 1: Plan for it -- Just like an e-mail system, Sametime Gateway environments should be deployed, monitored, and managed by understanding usage from a top-down view.**



download, install, and use multiple, unregulated IM clients. It provides a cost-effective, consistent approach to real-time collaboration in an encrypted, authenticated, and managed environment, and provides numerous user productivity benefits.

## Opportunity vs. reality

However, in reality Sametime Gateway has a decided impact on IM traffic, system complexity, and security (figure 1). Our organization was a beta user of Sametime Gateway and already has deployed it throughout the company. Since that time, we've been enthusiastic about the value Sametime Gateway brings to our real-time dialogs with suppliers, customers, and collaborators.



**Figure 2: Traffic info -- IT can better enforce corporate policies for IM dialogs when it can view and understand all the traffic going through Sametime Gateway.**

In our opinion, IT staffs should leverage Sametime Gateway as a real opportunity, while taking steps to address potential issues that may arise from its implementation.

## Traffic increases

Because IM traffic is considered small and not replicated such as e-mail, many IT professionals assume its impact on the network is insignificant. Yet servers must still power IM dialogs between any pair of users, whether users are communicating internally or through a Sametime Gateway. The personal IM exchanges made easier by Sametime Gateway are likely to cause dramatic IM traffic increases on an aggregate level and could even strain IT resources. Although Sametime Gateway deployments are still too new for anecdotal data, it's possible that several-fold increases in total IM traffic could occur -- meaning these deployments may require additional servers.

Second, Sametime Gateway will place additional storage demands, because publicly traded organizations must diligently log and archive IM communications per government regulation.

Third, the sheer volume of IM traffic may stretch current bandwidth by as much as several orders of magnitude. At present, IM traffic alone is almost inconsequential for most companies. New Sametime support for the "rich text" experience -- graphics, emoticons, video, etc. -- increases the bandwidth and chat storage requirements to be nearly on par with e-mail overhead. When IBM adds support for file transfer and other bandwidth-intensive features currently found in Sametime to the Sametime Gateway, bandwidth requirements will increase tremendously.

## Complexity

IM management is challenging enough given the US Supreme Court's ruling effective

with the amendments to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure in December 2006 mandating that all IMs, as well as e-mails, must be produced when requested as part of the discovery process for federal litigation. Although the Gateway unites IM traffic under one common IM client, Sametime still requires a third-party solution to log these interactions. IT staffs must choose such solutions with care to ensure the corporate network can log all the required public IMs with ease and minimum complexity, while still adhering to their corporate standards and regulations.

Beyond e-discovery requirements, achieving sufficient management and logging of IM is more difficult in today's new era of unified communications, where messaging capabilities are interwoven throughout applications; for example, attachments sent thru IM. IM management will only grow more complex when IBM adds more features and capabilities through the Sametime Gateway.

## **Security**

Although all Sametime traffic is encrypted, internally and through the Gateway, the Sametime Gateway may have the effect of opening a wide door that can connect huge new communities to the user base -- and result in more business and personal communications. With an increased number of personal dialogs comes increased organizational risk. If users can more readily chat and send information in and outside a network, there's an increased risk that confidential information will be leaked, offensive language will be shared through casual conversations, and spam and viruses will be more prevalent. Content filtering also will be more difficult because IM slang expressions used in many chat dialogs may initially evade detection.

Individuals sometimes use IM to avoid corporate controls placed on corporate e-mail use, whether real or perceived. Many of today's corporate users are rightfully suspicious that their e-mail will leave a paper trail and will be monitored according to corporate policies. Many are using IM as a way around these corporate policies, chatting in real-time and transferring confidential files. Sametime Gateway, then, becomes the catalyst for IT to make sure it is monitoring and managing IM traffic as tightly as e-mail.

## **Steps IT should take**

Sametime administrators and IT staffs should not hesitate to deploy Sametime Gateway and the rest of IBM's exciting UC2-enabling offerings. However, they should:

1. Plan to monitor the Sametime environment and enforce its use in accordance with corporate policies and restrictions, just as the IT staff does today with corporate e-mail (figure 2). Tools are starting to debut that manage and provide visibility into public IM traffic that is enabled by Sametime Gateway. IT staffs will need these tools to help enforce corporate policies for IM dialogs.
2. Establish a baseline understanding of present Sametime traffic levels and resource requirements, and plan to allocate enough server space and bandwidth to accommodate a possible several-fold increase in IM traffic.
3. Apply the lessons learned from deploying, monitoring, and managing an e-mail system to a Sametime IM environment. For example, make sure the IT staff has the tools to identify IM abusers -- whether it be because of time spent, downloads, number of connections, content of communications, etc. -- as well as to spot potential server resource issues, or even to perform departmental charge-backs in the organization for such public IM connectivity. The risk of not implementing IM regulations ratchets up a notch with increasing public IM traffic. You can't manage what you can't see, or understand.

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